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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on rural poverty in the Northeast relating to rural education and makes suggestions for educators who teach the rural poor. Against the theory of a "culture of poverty," which suggests that the rural poor avoid hard work by choice, the more recent view is that the poor often accept the Puritan work ethic and value hard work. The rural poor realize the worth of education and goals for social mobility and encourage these values in their children. However, there remains a statistical correlation between educational attainment and poverty. Approximately, one-third of the rural poor population will achieve to some extent; another third could achieve given the opportunity and means through education; the last third are much less likely to benefit from education due to their emotional or intellectual impairment. Despite the varying value for education held by the rural population, the notion of a "culture of poverty" is misleading. Recommendations for rural teachers to increase educational effectiveness are: (1) to "explode a societal myth" that education is sufficient to eradicate poverty; (2) to acknowledge blame along with parents when there is school failure among the poor; (3) to build a new relationship with poor parents based upon an understanding of parental attitudes; (4) to avoid negative stereotypes toward children; and (5) to change schools and social systems in order to assist poor students in their educational efforts towards social mobility. (LP)

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ON TEACHING THE RURAL POOR OF THE NORTHEAST: SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

GRS S0948, Directed Study
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In this paper, the rural poor of the Northeast are characterized, some of their attitudes towards schooling are depicted, and suggestions for educators who teach them are offered. The rural poor of the Northeast can be seen as a distinct educational clientele with special circumstances and needs of which educators striving to provide equal educational opportunity to them need to be aware.

Rodgers and Weiher, in Rural Poverty: Special Causes and Policy Reforms (1989), contrast rural poverty from urban poverty:

> rural poverty is more likely than urban poverty to be caused by inadequate employment compensation, rising unemployment, depression in the agricultural sector, and welfare eligibility rules that exclude significant proportions of the deserving poor (Rodgers and Weiher, xiii).

They refer to Leif Jensen's study "Rural-Urban Differences in the Utilization and Ameliorative Effects of Welfare Programs" to document the discriminatory impact of welfare programs:

> despite comparatively high poverty rates in nonmetropolitan areas, the rural poor were much less likely than their urban counterparts to receive welfare. Moreover, rural welfare recipients received considerably less welfare income, on average, than metropolitan recipients. Accordingly, the ameliorative effect of welfare was lowest in rural areas and highest in central cities. ...rural poor families were less likely to receive welfare than those in metropolitan areas because they were more likely to be working, older, childless, and headed by a married couple (Rodgers and Weiher, xiv).

Rodgers and Weiher also comment that the rural poor are less likely to be minority and more liable to have assets but a negative income than the urban poor (xiii).

Vidich and Bensman, in Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community (1968), avoided depicting what they called the "shack people" by range of income, and referred to them as a "declassed group" instead.

They describe economic conditions among the shack people:

> The range of occupations includes unskilled factory work, all types of unskilled manual labor and farm labor. The rate of job turnover is high.... work is apt to be seasonal, making for regular periods of unemployment, or they may choose to be unemployed for portions of the year when the weather is suitable for hunting and fishing. In other cases the wage-earner may be permanently adjusted to a state of semi-permanent unemployment due to invalidism, alcoholism or lack of work incentive.
>
> Irrespective of source of income there is usually a great variation in family income from year to year. As a consequence of this variability in income, the shack people do not plan consumption in long-range terms and it is this fact which shapes their daily living as well as family organization (Vidich and Bensman, 69-70).

Fitchen characterizes poverty as "an economic situation, an economic niche, and, often, an economic forecast" in Poverty in Rural America: A Case Study (1981), and counters some "myths" about the rural poor found in the quote above from Vidich and Bensman (61). Fitchen argues that most of the rural poor choose hard work and are not lazy, most very cleverly stretch their meager incomes and are not spendthrift, and most have high hopes and aspirations and are not lacking in ambition (61-62).

Vidich and Bensman, in describing the shack people as "permanently adjusted to a state of semi-permanent unemployment" because of lack of work incentive, seem to be using the "culture of poverty" paradigm: Poverty became a condition passed on from one generation to the next. Eleanor Burke Leacock, in The Culture of Poverty: A Critique (1971), suggests the differences between the poor and the nonpoor have three sources. First, the two groups have different traditions and histories which result in different objective life conditions. Second, different objective life conditions result in different adaptive behaviors in the two groups.

Finally, the different adaptive acts become institutionalized (e.g., in forms of ascribed status, government classifications and policies, etc.). Leacock claims that the closest one can come to talking about a "culture of poverty" is to refer to "subcultural variations across class lines" (i.e., implying that dominant cultural norms are not absent among the poor, who also cannot be classified solely on the basis of socio-economic class determined by income) (Leacock, 34). Indeed, while Vidich and Bensman claimed that the shack people "implicitly reject the whole complex of middle-class life styles" (69), more recently Hyman Rodman's conception of "lower class value stretch" has been applied to the poor. As William Ryan depicts it in Blaming the Victim (1976),

> lower class value stretch...proposes that members of the lower class share the dominant value system but stretch (Ryan's emphases) it to include as much as possible of the variations that circumstances force upon them (Ryan, 128).

More recently Michael B. Katz, in The Undeserving Poor (1989), describes lower class value stretch as the idea "that lower class people, without abandoning the general values of the society, developed an alternative set of values which helped them adjust to their circumstances" (Katz, 40). Katz refers to Liebow's study of "streetcorner society" which

> portrayed a "shadow system" of values that qualified Rodman's and others' concepts of "an alternative system of lower-class values" in two ways. First, alternative or stretched values differed from the general system of values because they are "derivative, subsidiary in nature, thinner, and less weighty, less completely internalized." Second, its users could not automatically invoke the alternative value system; instead, it was "a shadow cast by the common value system in the distorting lower-class culture." Liebow explained the behavior of poor black men "as a direct response to the conditions of lower-class Negro life rather than as mute compliance with historical or cultural imperatives." The streetcorner man

> did not carry an independent cultural tradition; rather, his behavior reflected his attempt to achieve many of the goals and values of the larger society and his attempts to conceal his failure from others and himself (Katz, 40).

If Fitchen is correct in her claim that the rural poor value hard work and its idealized positive outcomes, then possibly they are expressing lower class value stretch as well. Fitchen argues that there is no "subculture of children in poverty", but rather (echoing Leacock), that differences in life experiences which result in differences in economic conditions then result in differences in behavior in adapting to those economic conditions (126). Although some earlier writers (e.g., Vidich and Bensman) assumed that the rural poor at least sometimes avoided hard work by choice, the more recent assumption has been that the poor more often accept the Puritan work ethic and value hard work (Williams and Kornblum, 1985; Fitchen, 1981). Williams and Kornblum, in Growing Up Poor (1985), argue that the "community ecology" of the rural poor, unlike that of the urban poor, encourages hard work and thus positively influences the life chances of the poor to succeed through work (Williams and Kornblum, 3) and Fitchen directly supports this in describing parents' attitudes about the connection between school success and life success:

> Parents tend to be supportive of the childhood aspirations of their youngsters, rarely deflating their boasts of one day becoming a rich person, a famous race car driver, a teacher, a politician--even president of the United States. And many parents encourage and assist their children in the early years of school, urging them on, not letting them give up too easily, expressing their hope that the child do well in school as the first step toward a more satisfying adult life (Fitchen, 130).

Thus the rural poor are seen to accept the values of the dominant culture (although

contradictory assumptions and behaviors which work against full acceptance can also be detected as well).

In tracing historical changes in views on poverty, Katz laments that poverty has been framed in terms of family, race, and culture rather than in terms of inequality, power, and exploitation (8). Katz notes how the notion of the "undeserving poor" evolved, making poverty a moral rather than an economic condition (13). This phenomenon has been described by Ryan as one of "blaming the victim" and Katz argues that "culture of poverty" depictions allow those with political power to accept or justify the continued existence of poverty as a cyclical, inherited condition irremedially passed on from generation to generation (Katz, 1989). Katz draws on McLeod's analysis of white "Hallway Hangers" in Ain't No Makin It to claim that for some poor whites today, the achievement ideology is now being rejected because it makes parents seem lazy or stupid. Katz attributes this new, negative shift in attitude towards the benefit of work to recent mythologizing (e.g., by TV discussion of "dead end jobs" or "low ceiling work") that aspiration is not capable of lifting the poor beyond the clutches of a vicious socio-economic structure or an imprisoning "culture of poverty" (172). If such a change in attitude occurs among some of the young poor of the rural Northeast, then some of Fitchen's claims need a second look. Katznelson and Weir, in Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal (1985), have documented how the working poor have traditionally seen education as a "formula for citizenship" which would empower them to improve their situations politically by providing a liberal education (although they also suggest that the

strategy of working for change within the established socio-political system may not be as effective as working to achieve structural and organizational changes) (Katznelson and Weir, 1985). Willis' work in Learning to Labour suggests that the working poor might be learning to differentiate their true, limiting social and economic conditions from the myth of social mobility, and realizing that their odds of achieving significant mobility are slim, are reintegrating knowledge of their place in society such that resistance and opposition to social institutions like schools becomes their normal behavior (Willis, 1977, 62-3).

Regardless of such signs that attitudes of the poor towards the value of hard work and the achievement of social mobility may be changing, there remains a statistical correlation between educational attainment and poverty: On average, those who obtain more education tend to earn higher incomes (Zopf, 1989, 32; Lerman and Mikesell, 1989, 16). Thus, education seems to still be a factor in allowing at least some of the poor to achieve some social mobility, no matter how limited, even though that mobility might only represent an increase in relative deprivation as the whole income spectrum is increased (Tweeten and Walker, 1977, 48-9). Teachers committed to the ideal of equal educational opportunity and who work with the rural poor might keep in mind that school failure might not be due so much to a deprived, unamenable "culture of poverty" as to a difference in "style" and preparation (Ryan, 17-19) and that the poor will have less of a chance to find their "useful roles in society" without an adequate education (Williams and Kornblum, 13).

Teachers might better think of the lifeways of the rural poor not as a "culture of poverty", but as a type of folkway (as opposed to a stateway) (Redfield, 1960, 130-143). Customs and values could be distinguished that are characteristic of the particularistic folkway, as distinct from those of the larger stateway (although the two "ways" interpenetrate as two complementary forms of society). Murray L. Wax has classified poverty as a folk category rather than a socio-economic phenomenon: Those thought of as poor are interdependent with the rest of society, relying on society as society relies on them (Wax, 1971, 338+343). Vidich and Bensman suggest that the shack people

> are the degraded, declassed element whose social existence is noticed by other groups only when a negative image of comparison is needed (71).

While the rural poor might have traditionally been viewed as the "other" in comparison with dominant social groups, some writers believe that 20th century social disintegration has eroded the ethos as well as the folkway of many small communities where the rural poor reside, resulting in pervasive uncertainty about expectations and status between the rural poor and the dominant groups (Homans, 1950, 365; Redfield, 1960). Thus, while the "deserving poor" were once widely viewed with sympathy and caring compassion, the newer conception of the "undeserving poor" causes a mutual alienation between the poor and other social groups. Williams and Kornblum suggest that poor populations be viewed from a "rule of thirds" (Williams and Kornblum, 1985, 26-7). One third of the poor population would consist of the able and successful who somehow (effort, luck, push or pull) achieve their desired level of success. The middle third would consist of

the able and alienated, but includes those who would achieve if given the opportunity and means. Finally, there would remain the emotionally or intellectually impaired who are much less likely to be helped by education. Teachers would benefit from identifying those students who seem to fit each category: Those in the middle third would likely benefit most from educational efforts directed towards the poor (although all the "thirds" require equal educational opportunity).

Attitudes of the rural poor of the Northeast towards schooling can be gleaned from theoretical sources, ethnographic studies, and fictional accounts. Ryan comments that members of lower classes sometimes view helping professionals like teachers as the "giving enemy", a debilitating paradox (Ryan, 1976, 274). In the case of teachers, the giving enemy

> sees to it that children sit in the classroom--but he doesn't seem to like the children or understand them, and he is always scolding parents about poor home lives and lack of interest in education (Ryan, 275).

Williams and Kornblum explain that poor students often see an incompatibility between school and work: The former is not seen as necessary to acquire the latter, which is available immediately (although often in entry-level jobs with little chance for upward mobility) (42). Vidich and Bensman note how the shack people perceive the official government (presumably including educators) as those "crooks on the top" (155).

In Fitchen's ethnographic study (1981), seemingly contradictory attitudes about schooling abound. While positive attitudes about the value of schooling were evident, Fitchen noticed that grown men avoided her questioning and observation, suspecting that she was somehow connected with the welfare

department or the schools (26). While the public school was perceived as an important center of public activities up through the 1920s in Fitchen's "Chestnut Valley, NY" (36+43), depression hit the farm markets in the 1930s and significant differences began to appear in the education and school experiences of children of the poor. "Already in the 1930s, in the one-room school, some children were ridiculed" (53).

> (T)he families of limited economic resources and lower reputation rarely sent their daughters to high school; their sons, in some cases, never finish grammar school. The subsequent career profiles of these children tend to be confined to unskilled labor, interrupted work patterns and, in most cases, poverty (54).

Even with these differences in achieved status among the rural poor, "'poverty' was neither a social identification nor a derogatory epithet" (from 1920 to close to 1950) (54). It was only with a more recent loss of local community through the type of fragmentation and loss of moral cohesion (discussed by Homans, Redfield, and Katz) that such a negative perception of the poor became entrenched.

Besides institutional and structural factors which limit the poor to jobs with little potential for advancement, Fitchen discusses the effects of school failure on the prospects ofjob advancement.

> (M)en of these pockets of poverty are handicapped occupationally by a legacy of diminished self-esteem.
>
> Their own experiences in the competitive world of education and urban employment have further convinced them that failure is the expectation and often the fact.
>
> (L)ow expectations...become active forces inhibiting advancement in the job world, no matter how strong the commitment to work (66).

Low self-esteem results from school failure, which then causes low expectations

for success, resulting in a cycle of behaviors and attitudes. Guilt arises, which apparently is capitalized upon by advertisers and salespeople. Fitchen describes how feelings of shame which poor children bring home from school because of their lack of clothing are played upon by pitchmen who claim that the parents should then purchase something (e.g., encyclopedias, learning toys, etc.) because it will help improve schoolwork (when the money might better be spent on better, more nutritious food for the same purpose) (90-91). The valuing of the power of schooling by poor parents is thus exploited for private gain by producers of items of questionable educational worth. Conversely, Fitchen describes how some poor parents who have become emotionally dependent upon their children will keep them home from school for their company (109); occasionally, parental frustrations about their life failures then get discharged on the children or children's frustrations about school failure get discharged on the parents (117).

Yet the resilience of the faith in learning rebounds: Fitchen recounts a poignant scene.

> One young father told how eager he was for his little son, age two, to become old enough so he could read to him about history. The father, himself a high school dropout, had found the subject of history fascinating, and he hoped the boy would too. He kept his old history books from school safely wrapped in a cloth and hidden away until the child was old enough (129-130).

Further, sibling interdependency in school settings is strong among the children of the poor.

> In school...the interactions between siblings from rural poor families seem to be more frequent and more supportive than interactions between siblings from middle-class families (who sometimes pay no attention to one another). This characteristically higher level of sibling interaction

> seems to reflect not only continuing parental reinforcement, but particularly the need for protection. Mutual protection of siblings in school apparently arises as a result of the fact that many of the children experience difficulty in initiating and sustaining relationships with other, nonrelated children. This difficulty seems to result in part from children's early perceptions (by age seven or eight in some cases) that they are being avoided or rejected by others. Additionally, the difficulty results from the fact that their parents do not foster, either verbally or in action, social ties with other children, whereas children of more affluent homes receive encouragement and facilitation in developing an active social life and making new social contacts (133).

This atmosphere of lifeways-reinforcing social alienation is found in Williams and Kornblum when they argue that the poor find it difficult to be "strangers in new places", which then lowers their chances to be competitive in job searches (and likely limits the ability to make friends and allies in school among classmates and teachers) (Williams and Kornblum, 32).

Fitchen depicts family socialization practices which are incompatible with school expectations and practices: Uneven parental discipline which shows up as behavior compliance problems in school (136); children staying home from school in order to help head off impending family crises (137); family action-orientation which makes school seem boring to children (140). Yet these signs of what were once conceived of as "cultural deprivation" are balanced by behaviors and values supportive of schooling: Parental expression of hopes for high school education for their children (143); mothers' concerns about problems their children have in school (145). Yet fathers were noted to blame the schools for their children's failures and to even accept such a situation (145-146); Parents threatened and sometimes actually did pull their children out of school to keep them from being "ruined" (146). Fitchen characterizes school as a dream-shattering experience

for many academically able students, who eventually intentionally work below their potential in order to justify staying nearer to their families (147). The changing views about schooling over a child's lifetime are described:

> Another boy had always been bright and successful in school, with a flair for learning. While he was small, both his parents encouraged and applauded his pronouncements about a big future. But before the boy reached high school, dreams and realities appeared more incongruent with each other, and the incongruence could no longer be escaped by fantasy. The father appeared not to understand the studious bent of his son, berating him for his inability and lack of interest in performing "real work" at home, like repairing cars. In his early adolescence, the boy's identification with his father came to outweigh the dream he had shared with his mother--to finish high school, to go on to college and to bigger and better things. He also realized that to climb upward meant to climb outward, away from his family. Even though he felt that he <u>could</u> achieve these goals, he became less sure that he <u>should</u> (Fitchen's emphases). Consequently, the boy's school attendance dropped off, his work slipped, he lost interest, and then dropped out of school to become an unskilled teenage laborer.
>
> Although many parents believe that education will help their children attain a better life, some of them find that schooling, in fact, seems to contribute no particular benefits. When their children are young, parents are optimistic about education.
>
> > My son (four) is in the Head Start program now, and he's doing beautifully. Right there is where he is beginning to prepare for going to college. (A father with an incomplete elementary school education)
>
> But as children grow older, a more limited vision and a more limited educational goal is accepted.
>
> > About the highest goal any of us here want for our children in education is to have them graduate from high school. But there's a lot of kids that won't get that far. For some, their parents don't really care whether they finish. For others, it will be all the parents can do just to keep the child in school until he's sixteen, just to keep the law off their backs. Only a few parents will see any of their children graduate. (A mother who almost finished high school)

Even those children who have been successful in their early years, and who have had a great deal of help and encouragement from dedicated teach-

> ers along the way, may gradually become aware that there are other factors involved in climbing the ladder of success, and that the dreams of childhood may be beyond reach. The realization slowly comes that who you are, who your parents are, and where you live are important determinants of what you will become. This realization may be crippling to the individual (Fitchen, 147-8).

For the children of the poor, formal education is often "a limited, unhappy, and unsatisfactory experience": Adult memories of school are often not positive (Fitchen, 171). Undoubtedly, such attitudes are conveyed to and expressed by children.

Fitchen argues that poor people often perceive formal, institutionalized helping efforts (e.g., welfare, social service, public schools) from a "personalistic" perspective: If they like the particular individual attempting to help them, they will be less distrustful and more cooperative (and vice versa) (175). Thus, if poor parents do not like the educators working with their children, they will be more likely to attempt to terminate contacts or not attend school functions (177). Day care is most often provided not by a center, but by a relative or neighbor (due possibly as much to lack of money as to a tendency to "personalism"), and this early lack of participation with the larger society continues through the schooling years (178). Poor parents want to participate as members of larger social groups (like schools) on their own terms, presenting difficulties for regular attendance at open houses or parent-teacher conferences or other events (181).

Fitchen claims that school frustration sometimes is transferred by poor children into being a class clown or troublemaker; some become pregnant or

drop out to avoid setting and striving for other goals (194). The cycle of failure encountered in school lowers self-esteem and self-confidence (196); school performance is intentionally lowered to avoid expectations from teachers and parents; ultimately, lack of education is the reason then given by the poor for later failures (197). Early psychosocial deficits are reinforced and worsened in school (199).

Nonfiction works corroborate some of Fitchen's ethnographic evidence. Ernest Hebert's novel The Dogs of March (1979) features a middle-aged, illiterate white male in southwestern New Hampshire. Not only does this illiterate lack any knowledge of what the college education his son seeks involves, he believes that "education itself (is) a conspiracy to make certain that the knowledge of the world (is) unavailable" (Hebert, 1979, 10-12). College education had "reformed" his son, making the son unlike the father in thought, desire, and action and alienating each from the other (39); thus, the illiterate relegates a college education to the function of preparing people to get up the will to kill themselves (165); such is a danger of "souping-up" the mind with education (145). Yet the illiterate sorely realizes the disadvantages of not having an education in his own case: He regrets it being too late in his own case to pick up the "education code" (14-5) as he numbly contemplates a form in the unemployment office (66-7) (although in the end, this character contemplates the possibility of learning how to read) (247-8). The dichotomies observed by Fitchen are revealed in Hebert's work: The valuing of schooling is obvious, but a hatred of the school experience comes through as well. Teachers are despised for "not giving (a student) a chance" and "forcing him to

quit at sixteen." (151). The felt hurt of school failure and dispossession is expressed through the composition of song lyrics about a teacher erasing a student drawing of a heart from the blackboard (173). Such feelings are buried under the faith that illiteracy "arms one with a unique perspective" on the world (87) and that the destroyed brains suffered on college campuses are only temporary (160). The shift in attitude noticed by Fitchen, from early valuing of schooling to eventual failure to final resignation and acceptance is apparent in these passages.

In Hebert's A Little More Than Kin (1982), small-town burglars learn to read in order to peruse the newspaper for tips on when houses might be vacant (39) and Sesame Street is viewed by a poor parent as containing little of value and much of harm (Oscar the Grouch is admirable, while the rest of the "reasonable" characters seem to convey a false image of the real world and how it works) (44). While one old man seems to be admired for reading much but having little formal education (4), reading is generally perceived as "coming to no good" (97). Again, the seeming contradiction between valuing and despising education is apparent.

In Carolyn Chute's The Beans (1985), an adolescent male in poverty is characterized as being in fifth grade and having "stayed back a million times" (Chute, 1985, 60) and as not socializing in the cafeteria at lunch (61). A female in grade school is given a strap by her Special Ed. teacher to hold on her glasses (156) and this teacher is eventually scorned for repeatedly sending home unheeded notes about the girl's gum disease (177). In Chute's Letourneau's Used Auto Parts (1988), parents administer corporal punishment for skipping school (Chute, 1988,

32-3) and threaten the same if a child misses the school bus (71); a male adolescent is admonished that he would have "normal, sweet girlfriends" if he attended school (90) and a middle-aged woman is thought of as a "friggin' schoolteacher" because she knows so much (89). Conversely, students feign mock fear at the prospect of being caught skipping school (30) (that "stinks" anyhow (29)), deliberate over quitting school (37) (which is balanced against the lucrative trade of selling condoms in school (43)), and conclude that school is for "fairies" because no money can be made there (70). Still, a good education is recognized as necessary in order to "amount to something" (72). Yet, an older male attempts to publicly assault and rape a drunk schoolteacher in a bar, even though she is a stranger to him (108-111). Again, the violent contrasts in attitudes about schooling among the rural poor of the Northeast are portrayed.

In Garrett Keizer's No Place But Here, an autobiographical account of teaching in a secondary school in northern Vermont, school is seen by poor parents as an intimidating place to return to (for open house) because it is the site of their own previous pain, frustration, and school failure (Keizer, 1988, 59). Yet Keizer suggests that the poor parents of his poor students still would insist that school is a necessary preparation for a fit life in the "real world" (67). Again, alternate longing for and loathing of schooling is expressed.

For teachers desiring to better serve their students of rural poverty, at least three different, non-exclusive approaches can be prescribed: personal, institutional, and societal. The personal approach will be most extensively considered here, although the institutional and societal will also be addressed.

In advocating the upgrading of educational levels of the poor as a strategy to alleviate rural poverty, Debertin and Infanger ask whether funds should be devoted to the education of the youngest children, to prevent adolescent dropping-out, or to job-training of young adults to acquire vocational skills (Debertin and Infanger, 1989, 94). However, while funding for any of these would likely help diminish the educational disparities which help allocate poverty, it is highly unlikely that any such funding will come from governments in the near future. As former Secretary of Education William J. Bennett stated, "Some of the reforms needed (to improve public education) may, in some circumstances, require increased spending, but most will not" (Bennett, 1987, vi). Such an attitude seems pervasive still among elected officials, and educators may have to reconcile their desire to widen educational opportunity and access to poor pupils with a diminished expectation of financial help from government.

Following Fitchen's description of poor people viewing bureaucrats from a personalistic perspective, teachers might better aid students in poverty by viewing each of them as unique individuals with unique life experiences and goals. Willis has recommended that a "cultural approach" be used to identify prospective problematic cases (i.e., each individual's cultural heritage and influences need to be traced and understood in order to devise a course of action) (Willis, 1977, 188); Zopf has warned that teachers need to avoid following a self-fulfilling prophecy towards their poor wards that results in teaching practices which can cause school failure (e.g., diluting curriculum and standards, intractable tracking, etc. (Zopf, 1989, 32-3); Sleeter and Grant draw on Valentine to warn against

> educated students as to be suggesting that if we let parents see more of what we do, they won't mind paying us more to do it. Instead of a revolution in parent-school relations, we call for a better grade of public relations. We don't want parents informed about education so much as we want them converted to its "interests"--as defined, of course, by educators (Keizer, 1988, 55-56).

Willis suggests that a differentiation develops in the mind of poor parents and (then their children) between the idealized potential of upward social mobility and the more daunting realities (Willis, 1977, 62-3). Such differentiation is supported by both the home and work cultures, as the working poor penetrate the myths of schooling (Willis, 72-3+ 126). Willis recommends that teachers bring this "double coding" of social class and institutional meanings to the awareness of students, using cultural forms as subjects of the curriculum (190-1), echoing Fitchen's call to "explode a societal myth". To the end of heightening awareness and establishing meaning of individual's life experiences, both Williams and Kornblum and Kozol advocate the writing and revising of life histories of poor people (Williams and Kornblum, 1985, 120; Kozol, 1985, 132-47).

Williams and Kornblum have noticed how the "Superkids" among poor children (i.e., the highest achievers in the upper third) have the greatest parental support for their educational efforts (16-7). The life courses of such children are set by adult mentors (including parents and teachers) who value success through schooling (Williams and Kornblum, 10) and who help shield children from pernicious influences through involvement in family, school, and religious practices (21). Williams and Kornblum believe that

"a tendency to stereotype and oversimplify and to take an either-or position where none is needed" (Sleeter and Grant, 1988, 63). Thus, while Williams and Kornblum's "rule of thirds" might helpfully be used to reach a preliminary indication of which students might hold the pattern of attitudes towards schooling among the "poor" revealed in the ethnographic literature and fictional works, individual experiences and needs must inform any judgment and action.

Fitchen gives five recommendations for educators attempting to increase educational effectiveness for the rural poor in order to remove barriers to upward mobility, four of which are applicable for a personalistic approach. First, teachers can "explode a societal myth" that education is sufficient to eradicate poverty: Students could discuss institutional, organizational, and structural factors which help cause and perpetuate poverty as a means to fuller understanding. (Perhaps with such understanding, the phenomenon discussed by Katz whereby the children of poor parents have begun to discard the achievement ideology because it seems to imply that "lazy or stupid" parents are to blame for poverty can be countered.) Second, teachers can "bury an old argument" about who is to blame for school failure among poor students, the schools or the parents. Parents and their children need to hear teachers say that not just parents, but also the teachers are partly to blame for such failures. Third, Fitchen urges teachers to "build a new relationship" with poor parents (214) and describes how teachers may not realize that parents actually do care about their children's school progress:

> (Poor parents') caring is not recognized because of several factors: (1) parents may not express their caring in ways that the school understands or expects--such as making sure their children attend school every day and coming in for conferences with teachers; (2) parents may care so very much that they are deeply hurt by any hint of a child's difficulty in school and may consequently withdraw from contact or become hostile toward the school; (3) parents may have unrealistic hopes, expectations, and fears about schools, education, and their children; and (4) parents may be bogged down by too many other problems and crises to pay much attention to the everyday details, notices, and requests that children bring home from school (Fitchen, 1981, 214).

Fitchen suggests that schools view parents as partners in the education of their children and urges schools to help parents in the tasks of helping children learn, beginning at the youngest ages (215). Throughout, Fitchen assumes that parents want to see their children succeed in school. While this may be so for Williams and Kornblum's upper and middle thirds, it may be questionable for children of the "lower third". Bennett says that "disadvantaged parents, like all parents, vary in the degree to which they take an interest in their children's education" (Bennett, 1987, v). Bennett argues that in such cases, schools and their teachers must "not take this as an excuse for failing to educate children" (v). Keizer also comments negatively on the prospect of enlisting the aid of poor parents in their children's education:

> The challenge schools and teachers need to face is how to make the classroom...more inclusive and thus more humane.
>
> Admittedly, there are obstacles, not the least of which is a deep-seated and at times well-founded distrust between school and parents. Many parents feel as though all we really want them to do is pay up and shut up. One wonders if they're far off the mark. Education groups calling for "greater parent involvement" seem not so much to be saying that involved parents mean better-

schools and social welfare agencies are the most promising places for poor children to find adult mentors (108). Fitchen, however, expresses reservations about such prospects:

> in his choice of role models, the child who once identified with... schoolteachers...may grow up to identify only with persons in the home environment, because he perceives that it is unrealistic to pattern himself after the models presented to him in the "outside world" (Fitchen, 200).

Whether poor students in the middle and lower thirds would benefit from modeling by teacher role models thus seems problematic: Williams and Kornblum suggest that exposure to role models of the same socio-economic beginnings who have since become successful may be of benefit (44-6). Willis recommends the utilization of classroom groupings which lessen the likelihood that schools will perpetuate current social stratification (190-1). However, Fitchen provides a cautionary note:

> extra care must be taken, particularly in settings involving heterogeneous mixtures of young children and teenagers, lest situations arise that would either reinforce stereotypes in people's minds or permit discriminatory behavior based on stereotypes. Merely putting children together is not enough; situations must be creatively designed to foster healthy interaction (Fitchen, 217).

Fitchen's fourth recommendation for a personalistic approach is to "avoid negative stereotypes toward children" (215). Teachers should become aware of and avoid situations in which

> The child is blamed for who his parents are, where they live, how they live. He is stigmatized on the basis of what the school thinks his older siblings have done or not done, by the reputations of his cousins.
>
> Schools must become conscious of such judgments to stop them. Otherwise these insidious attitudes toward children can undermine

> and undo the benefits of even the most conscientious teachers and the most effective teaching methods, for children read these negative messages more clearly and deeply than they read any benign messages (Fitchen, 1981, 216).

Perhaps teachers and schools could use either the "Human Relations" or "Multicultural Education" approaches described by Sleeter and Grant to deepen awareness, understanding, and compassion about lifeways differences (Sleeter and Grant, 1988). Sleeter and Grant also advise teachers to become aware of students' learning styles, which may be influenced by differences in socialization (e.g., Fitchen's observation of "action-orientation"), and modify teaching methods accordingly (16). (Williams and Kornblum depict the fourteen-year-old who "wanted to work with his body", but whose school provided no programs with the opportunities to do so, (39)). The U.S. government report Schools That Work: Educating Disadvantaged Children lists numerous ways to "tailor instructional strategies", including peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching (i.e., learning the skills that expert readers use in understanding a text), effective questioning strategies, etc. (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1987, 27-30)

Essentially, teachers need to strive to create opportunities for achievement for all students of all socio-economic classes and lifeways (Fitchen, 221). A "continual opportunities for growth model" could be formulated with this goal in mind (Williams and Kornblum, 113).

Fitchen's fifth recommendation for educators dealing with the rural poor is to "study the schools" (Fitchen, 215), a vital task if Ryan is correct in claiming that the ultimate task is to change the schools, not the children (Ryan, 263).

Sarason notes that teachers must challenge their own operational assumptions of which they may not have been consciously aware (e.g., beliefs that the poor deserve to fail, or that the "lower third" are irremediable): In order to change overt behavioral regularities, underlying covert principles, theories, and assumptions must become conscious (Sarason, 1971). Sleeter and Grant, drawing on Everhart's study of white working-class junior high boys, comment that

> Everhart found the students actively engaged in creating a culture that would help make school livable.
>
> The teachers seemed unaware that the school culture was generated partly in response to what they offered the students; and the low level of academic work, accepted by both teachers and students, helped ensure the students a working-class future.
>
> Student culture...helps shape many of the decisions students make about school and develops as much from within the school as from outside the school. Many teachers believe that all or most of their students' values and beliefs are generated only from outside; students who fail, turn off, drop out, or choose low-ability or vocational classes are doing so in spite of the school's attempt to give all an equal chance. These teachers often blame the students' home culture or society in general (Sleeter and Grant, 24-5).

Not only must the culture of the school be studied and modified by teachers in order to most fully assist poor students in their educational efforts towards social mobility, but societal factors at the structural and organizational levels must also be addressed. As Ryan notes, citing Herbert Gans, the primary cause of social problems like poverty is powerlessness and the cure is power (Ryan, 250). Solutions at the classroom and building level are "exceptionalistic" and may help alleviate some immediate, local problems, but Ryan recommends that

a more "universalistic" approach at the societal level be undertaken (Ryan, 17-9). Adequate housing, more secure employment, and equitable welfare is needed; funding for early education and re-entry programs is vital as well. Teachers could join in efforts towards these ends by utilizing Sleeter and Grant's "Education That is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist" approach and becoming "transformative intellectuals" (Sleeter and Grant, 175-201; Giroux, 1988).

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